

PROPOSALS, for true Peace in the Church of Scotland, humbly offered to the consideration of all Judicatories, Ministers and Members thereof in a Letter to a Friend.

ANY who duly consider the many Spiritual Plagues we have long been under, with the LORD's withholding his Presence from Gospel Ordinances, and likewise the Temporal strokes which have been inflicted upon us, will be forced to grant that the LORD hath a Controversie against these Lands for our Sins; We may also look on't as a Fruit and effect of Divine Anger, that we who go under the designation of Presbyterians have long had many unpleasant contentions and divisions among our selves; How dangerous these are, cannot easily be apprehended: sure, they deserve not the Name of Christians who are altogether unconcerned herein. To advise proper Remedies for averting the LORD's Wrath, and curing our Divisions, as it would require the greatest considerations of an Assembly of Learned Divines; So I take the boldness to averr, it would at this time be more Worthy of and Suitable unto their Character and Office than any other Business, I can think on, which may be Subjected to their Cognizance.

Having admired that so little in this kind is aimed at, and fearing the bad event of such a Neglect, I have prevailed with my self to send these Lines abroad to see if through the Lord's blessing, they might prove any mean to set on foot a work of the highest importance.

In order to a Cure the Causes of our Disease must be enquired into, which being innumerable, I shall only mention this comprehensive General, Our Personal and Publick Backslidings from GOD his Cause and Way, and then our refusal to Repent thereof and return truly to the LORD are undoubtedly the causes of Divine Displeasure, and also of our many Differences, Divisions and Subdivisions. It pleased our good and gracious GOD to reform these Lands from Popery and Prelacy in an eminent remarkable manner, and to establish in this Church Sound Doctrine, Pure Worship, right Discipline and Government, for the perpetual security, and constant Preservation whereof, He graciously and Powerfully moved our worthy Ancestors to enter into a National Covenant and Oath, which was often renewed and repeated, and also stirred up Our General Assemblies for the space of Twelve Years, viz. From Anno 1638 to 1649 inclusive, to make excellent Acts and constitutions approving and confirming that reformed Religion, which were corroborat and ratified by good Laws and Acts of Parliament. These Vows Oaths, Acts and Laws (being the firmest Tyes imaginable amongst Men) were made with the greatest Cheerfulness and Resolution, as may be seen by viewing the Terms and Expressions thereof. How Strictly in like manner England and Ireland bound themselves with Scotland in the famous Solemn League and Covenant, to the same Effect, is abundantly known in the World. This Covenanted work of Reformation made the Church of Christ in Britain and Ireland, Beautiful and Honourable in the Eyes of Sister Churches: The LORD being pleased to carry it on, in remarkable advances by his own

outstretched Arm, and to shine on his Churches with the kind Beams of his Grace and Favour during the foresaid Reforming-Time. But ah! How soon did our Gold become Dim? Lam. 4. 1. When wearied of the LORD's Way and Work, and *facilis desensus Averni*; Our declining when once begun, had a swift motion till at length the Reformation was almost wholly overturned by subsequent Laws ever since thereof, violently put in execution to the Pitch, of shedding the Saints Blood. The tragical story of that Time should be kept in Memory, in regard the Lord seems to be pointing thereat by the Troubles we have been lately under; and unless the Iniquities then done to the Mediator's Interest and People be duly laid to Heart and repented of (which, hitherto hath not, I fear, been done by many) there's reason to fear the LORD will testify his Resentment of the same to and higher degree. We have not wanted Noble Opportunities at and since the Revolution for retrieving what was lost of the Reformation, but so remiss were we, that an overly half Reformation satisfied us, yea we have not stood firm to what was regained at the Revolution; many new Steps of Backsliding have both the Church and Civil Government made of late Years. Religion is at a low eb, and iniquity like a deluge overwhelms all places: How far Magistrates, and how far Ecclesiastick Officers are guilty of and chargeable with the same. I shall not now take on me to show; I wish they may respectively enquire therein to themselves: their Omission of this Duty hath (I am apt to think) occasioned the discoveries and representations of grievances made by these who withdraw from the Established Church, the Truth and Weight of which Grievances should be examined and considered in order to a redressing of what is really amiss. As for these Dissenters, It's plain they need not so accuse others as to justify themselves, How miserably are they Divided among themselves? And by the wide distances they keep up, they bewray too great goodness to throw up that sweet thing the Communion of Saints, yea, I am not afraid to say that each of these Parties are deeply guilty of manifold Defections themselves, especially with respect to inward Decays, This I conceive, the Strictest of them will not have the Confidence to deny.

Seeing therefore, We are all guilty and have provoked the Lord to anger, being no Party, no Person is free or innocent, every one having added Oyl to this Flame: Let us not continue excusing and justifying our selves, and throwing all the blame on these who differ from us: this way hath been too much Trod already; nay rather let all sorts and degrees all Parties, and Persons search out their own particular Sins, be affected with, Repent off and turn from them in the way of Faith, and new Obedience:

I therefore adventure, yet in all Humility, to offer a few Proposals, which if safe and agreeable to GOD's Word, as I hope they shall be found: Do challenge serious Attention and a due Compliance

phance by virtue of their material Equity, tho' the Author be very inconsiderable, the expediency of them, I presume none who are truly Godly will

Proposal I. Let Strife, rancor, Bitterness, Alienation, Envy, and censoriousness be guarded against on all Hands: in lieu whereof; let us all seek to be influenced and acted by the quickning Spirit of CHRIST: See *Gal. 5. 22. Phil. 1. 2, 3. &c.* the 12, 13 and 15 Chapters of the Epistle to the *Romans James Chap. 4.* throughout *1-Cor. 3. 1, 2. &c. Eph. 4. 31, 32.*

Pro. II. Let us all acknowledge the goodness of God in keeping the several Parties of *Presbyterians* sound and Arthodox in the main: They all own the holy Scriptures as the only infallible Rule of Faith and Manners, and profess an Adherence to our Confession of Faith, Larger and shorter Catechisms, Sum of saving Knowledge, Directory for Worship, Propositions of Church Government, and our Covenants, the National Covenant, and the solemn League and Covenant, with the good Acts of Assembly from 1638. to 1649, and other such Attainments in Reformation. I hope none or at least not many of the Presbyterians differ in a professed owning of these; If any of them do condemn or dispise any of the forsaide Attainments, they should be noted and animadverted upon according to the degree of their Offence.

Pro. III. Let the forsaide Principles, wherein we all profess an agreement be carefully view'd, and look'd over, that each Party, and every Person, Ministers, Magistrates, and private Christians, and these both High and low may see and be convinced of their Counteracting and contravening these excellent Principles. Let us all take an impartial tryal of our Heart and ways by that ballance and Standard, that we may distinctly see how disconform and unlike we have been to these our Principles, both by omission of incumbent Duties and Commission of Sins: Thus all Persons in Church State, Army or Country will be made to see they have departed from the Lord and His way, times and ways past reckoning: This Proposal, I am sure cannot in Reason be refus'd, being only design'd to bring our Practice under Tryal by the Rule of our professed Principles.

Pro. IV. Taking it for certain that on this due examination, all Parties and Persons will find innumerable Failures and sinful steps. The next Proposal is, That Days of Fasting and Humiliation, and Prayer be kept in Secret, Private and Publick for these Causes, imploring forgiveness through the Blood of Christ, and the Holy Spirits sanctifying influences, to cause us walk in Newness of Life; We should also pray, that the Lord may convince us more and more of the Causes of his Displeasure, *Job. 10. 2.* And should welcome what Discoveries He is pleased to make.

Pro. V. Let us all study a thorow Reformation, Personal and National according to God's word, and the above mentioned uncontraverted Principles; Let every Person in whatever Station who professeth any regard to GOD and His way; Labour in the first place to know the Truth, reality and Power of Godliness in the Inner-man, for how great soever our Profession and seeming Zeal be; Whatever Gifts, Endowments and blameless Lives before Men we may have, yet unless we be new Creatures, not walking after the Flesh but after

the Spirit. *2. Cor. 5. 17. John, 3. 3. Rom: 8. 11. Job. 15. 4. 5. 6.* We cannot bear any Fruit pleasing to GOD, I wish we may carefully and chiefly in the first place mind to lay this foundation aright otherways there will be no good Superstructure.

In the next place, let us all according to our respective capacities, stations & opportunities endeavour after Family Reformation, Congregational & National, as we are bound in our Covenant to do.

Pro. VI. Let Amicable Christian Conferences be kept among differing Parties, wherein 'tis advisable that one Partie claim not a Superiority above another till difference be accomodat, Let Offences given or taken be discountenanced in order to find out what really is offensive to a Holy GOD, and not to reproach, shame or insult over one another. Conferences of this Nature, if sincerely designed, and rightly managed might through the Lord's blessing prove very useful, if Men would guard against their own Spirits & speak and hear in Love and Meekness, rejoicing in any degree of unanimity and when differences cannot be removed altogether, Parties should beware lest Matters grow worse, because at such a juncture Satan & our Corruptions labour to represent differences in a magnifying Glass, and to make us look on any degree of Concord with disregard and contempt. Albeit any of the differing Parties may move for such Conferences, yet I conceive it most proper for these who are in most Authority to propose and set them on Foot.

Pro. VII. There would be a yeilding to one another wherein soever we may do it without Sin, & we should show a readiness to join in these Duties which are uncontraverted, and wherein we agree, waiting Patiently upon these who differ from us, till it please the Lord to vouchsafe a further measure of Light, *Phil. 3. 16.* Hence time should be allowed to these who scruple & remain unclear to join in close communion with this Church, that they may endeavour first to have satisfaction to their Consciences; otherwise tho they should be forced by Minaces and Censures, their edification will inevitably be marred; I am fully perswaded that peaceable loving and tender Methods will be found better, and far more safe, than severe and harsh Treatments, whereby animosities and Heart alienation increase for the most part.

Pro. VIII. The last Proposal I make is that the Lord's Servants and People every where be much exercised in Prayer to GOD for the down powering of his Spirit from on High, without which a recovery out of our sad condition is not to be expected. Do we not see how all endeavours have proven Abortive time after time? Let all then who fear the Lord wrestle for his return, as the Church, *Psal. 76. 8. 9 and 80 and 74 and 85.*

I am hopefull these Proposals if the Lord help to a sincere Compliance with them, would tend to the special advantage of his wasted and weakened Church. I therefore in the most earnest manner obtest all both Ministers and private Christians to take the same into their serious Consideration, laying aside prejudices, Pride, self seeking and Sinisterous designs, studying above all things how the Lord's Contravertie against us may be removed; Religion, Reformation and Unity may be revived. But if any turn away their Ears from such things as make for Peace, they thereby show they love not the Peace Prosperity and Good of our Jerusalem.

F I N I S.